

QUAD, Volume LXVII



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# QUAD 2006

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# QUAD

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Megan Roth

TO THE DEAD BOY IN GREEN

Naked in the bathroom window,  
Bleary eyed,  
I watched your morning news  
From across the street.

Two men in blue  
Swung a hammock of body  
On to a stretcher,  
Grey sneakers hanging off the edge.

I covered myself with warm hands  
As they carted you toward me,  
Your dark green sweatshirt,  
Untied laces,  
Face of snow.

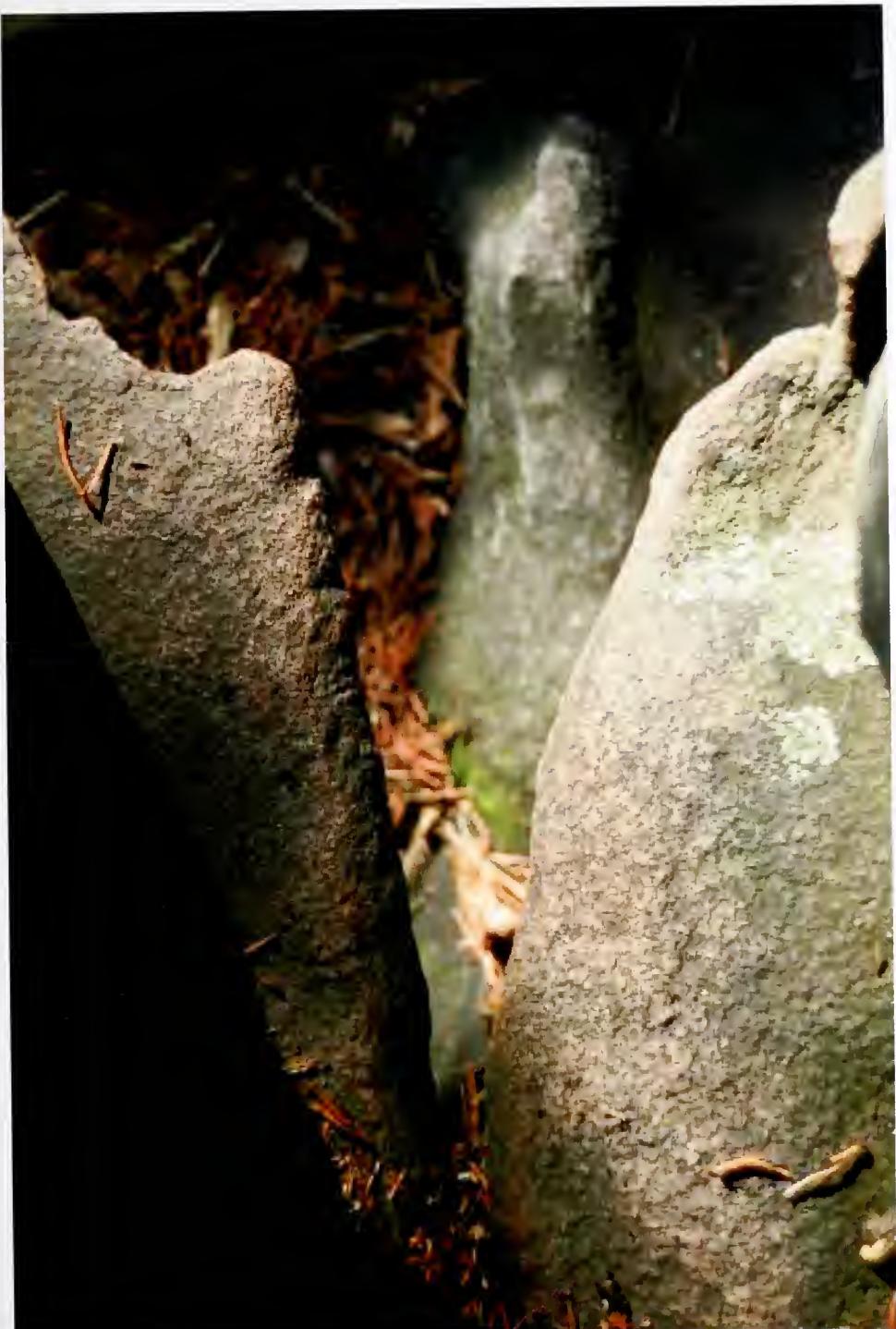
They pulled you like overstuffed luggage,  
Their childhood red wagon,  
Rattling like a pocket of change  
Over each crack.

I searched for you between the Arthurs  
And the Ellie May Fishers,  
But there was no boy in sneakers  
In the obituaries.

I won't lie to you,  
You didn't look peaceful  
Or glad to see me,  
But I never turned away.

And I can't say I won't judge you  
Because we might have been friends,  
Or more than neighbors,  
We could have shared drugs.

I think about you  
When I take out black bags of garbage,  
Or throw my backpack in the hall.  
And I just wanted to let you know  
What happened.



Ashley Eslava, I'LL FIND MY OWN WAY DOWN

A MADONNA SO YOUNG

old soul  
stride—  
73 years old.  
tell us  
are there sparkly bags  
and chapped pinks.

lift and harm  
like medicine.

don't worry  
i can hear you.

73 years  
in that tan  
strap across your chest.

write your name  
there.  
just there  
like michelangelo.

i can see you.

Chris Adkins

*La rencontre des chats*

Cousin, I cannot avoid you.

Your eyes shine at me through the nightshade  
your every step – a silent beckoning  
With a *pas de chat*  
I'm in pursuit.

Cousin, feel no shame for what you are  
for some are made to take home  
and some just to take out  
so I will meet you  
where the light is most dim -  
where no one will hear you purr.

Cousin, don't inquire about tomorrow.  
What snowy landscape is the same  
even after a day?  
But for a night of brilliance,  
before the paws of the neighborhood awake  
to press through the morning's surprise -  
it is pristine.



Kim Thomas, FROMAGE

SENDING HER BACK

Shallow depths hold  
the blood of the scales  
red, yellow, and silver.  
Touch for  
yourself to see  
how slimy, slippery  
sharp the Whitefish  
of Montana is.  
I cast.  
The yellow line  
whipping through  
the cool wind  
between the canyons.  
The echo of coyote  
followed by moose.  
The silver hook  
through it's bottom lip.  
I pull it out of the water.  
Air seeps through  
slits, gills  
I know nothing about.  
It's tail gives  
a quick flip  
piercing the back  
of my blackened  
hand holding it.  
Cherry red blood  
Smears and runs  
Down my wrist  
Mixing with  
Clear river water.  
Godlike I know  
It will die soon  
and that maybe  
it's better this way.  
My choice to  
spare it or not.  
Through the surface  
I see a larger  
one circling  
and think,  
I want to go back  
to my mother too.



Kelly Gilbreath, MISPLACED ANGER



Moriah Osborn, THE BACKSPLITTER

Claire Burgess

### GRANDFATHER COMPLAINS THAT THE TURKEY IS DRY

My grandmother's hands have been hard laborers.

They have vacuumed rugs  
run threadbare by small feet,  
scrubbed white linoleum  
peeling yellow at the edges,  
dusted brown photographs  
of a grim-faced generation,  
and shined silverware for this supper  
that has been cooking for three hours.

Her weary hands shake  
as she grips orange pot holders  
that have worn too thin to keep  
the hot casserole dish  
from raising red spots on the tips  
of her fingers.

Tomorrow,  
these will be blisters.

For now, she will comfort  
the boiled meat of her hands  
in a stream of cold tap water  
that is more cloudy than clear  
and tastes of the bitter  
rust of lead pipes.

But the faucet drips at night,  
and the knots of her knuckles crack  
like wishbones,  
and the heels of her hands  
have been scrubbed of their wrinkles,  
and her yellowed curling cuticles  
sting of cheap dish soap.

The cool water that calms  
the burn  
chills  
through her tissue paper skin,  
slows her gravy brown blood,  
and wakes her bones  
to the slow dull ache  
of years spent  
serving.



Rankin Miller, UNTITLED

## THE GIVING AWAY AND THE KEEPING

“Grab that rope!” yelled Dad. From where I was crouched on the frame of the catamaran, I could see any number of ropes that might need grabbing.

“Which one?” I called back. I stayed put, hunkered down, to avoid being smashed in the head by the reckless main sail. I looked up at Dad who was straddling the catamaran, one foot on each hull. As if the boat were a see-saw and he both the riders, he shifted his weight from side to side in an attempt to keep us up right. His fair skin had already pinkened to a hue near that of his red swimming trunks. His black hair, with the neat right part and the classic swoop over the eye, was plastered to his scalp. His white beach hat had blown off his head and, harnessed by the neck strap, flapped about behind him like an out of control kite. Sweat dripped down his forehead, under his large, opaque sunglasses, and hung stubbornly from the tip of his sunscreened nose. A mess of ropes enwrapped his ankles and in his hands he held a knot of other ropes, which he was

frantically trying to untangle. He yanked on each rope, trying to find the one that would stop the jib sail from swinging around.

“God damn it,” he said as a rope loosed itself from his grasp and flew out of reach. I knew Mom wouldn’t have liked him saying that, but she wasn’t there. We two were alone 500 yards off the coast of the Florida panhandle—my dad a first-time sailor, and me his eight-year-old daughter.

We were out there because Dad had gotten antsy relaxing on the beach. He can’t stand sitting still. At home he occupies himself with projects like arranging the family photo albums, planting shrubs on the sheer incline above our retaining wall, or tinkering on the computer. But we were on vacation and Dad was bored. He’d already thrown the Frisbee, the football, joined some teenage boys’ volleyball game, taken a four-mile jog down to the beach, rented an ocean kayak, blown up an inflatable two-man lifeboat, and rowed himself beyond the breakers. He needed something bigger. He wanted to rent a catamaran. He’d refused to let the guide join us who, we were told, typically accompanied inexperienced sailors. For one, a guide would have been more expensive. Second, the guide would have taken the fun out of it. Dad avoids listening to instructions whenever possible. He would much rather figure things out himself, either through logic, research, or, in this particular case, trial and error.

Dad had imagined his family, alone on the ocean, sailing into the Pensacola sunset. He’d envisioned each of us busy at our respective tasks, collaboratively and effectively manning the proud vessel of which he was captain. No doubt he had even considered the possibility of buying such a boat and entertained the idea of future familial nautical adventures.

As it turned out, I was the only one he could talk into getting on the thing. So we’d left Mom, my four-year-old brother Preston, and the skeptical guide back on the shore.

“Grab the rope!” he shouted again.

“Which one?” I yelled back. He didn’t answer. He just stood there yanking on his frustrated knot of ropes. I knew that he didn’t have any particular rope in mind, that he just needed to yell, so I picked one and grabbed it. Just then the boat started to lean unnaturally to the leeward side.

“Go to the right!” shouted Dad. “To the right!” He himself stepped off the left hull and stood completely on the right in attempt to counterbalance the vessel. I was doubtful that my fifty-pound body would do much good against the gulf winds, but I followed orders. Despite the

added weight, the right side of the boat kept lifting out of the water and the left side kept going under. As if in slow motion, the whole thing rotated over, wrenching me from my grip on my rope.

“Shit!” yelled Dad as the boat capsized and we both catapulted through the air, up, up, out away from the boat, and down into the sea. I came up, shocked, spitting brimey water, but relatively unharmed. Our boat, however, was turtled, pitchpoled, pole-axed. It had ceased its rocking and was floating quite peacefully mast down, hulls up. “Ashley!” I heard Dad call from somewhere on the other side of the overturned boat.

“Over here!” I called back. He appeared from around the stern and doggy-paddled over to me, pulling the salvaged cooler of cokes and ziplocked sandwiches he’d packed for a scenic boat picnic.

“Well, maybe next summer,” he said.

“Sure Dad,” I said into my oversized life preserver. We bobbed there in silence next to the upside down catamaran and waited for the guide to come and rescue us.

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With only a few months now until my wedding day, I’ve recently found myself thinking a lot about Dad and about incidents like this one. I’ve questioned what I like about his character, what I don’t. I’ve wondered about the impact Dad’s presence has had on my life. What about my Dad will I miss and what about him do I want to cling to?

Dad is a romantic. He is a visionary, an artist living in a disorderly world. He is certainly artistic in the typical sense. He has a gift for writing. His words have an easy flow, a pulse. He also possesses an innate eye for design. Despite his lack of photographic training he has a natural sense of spacing and light. He has taken hundreds of thousands of photographs over his lifetime; it is his passion. Without any sort of background in architecture, he successfully drew up the plans for our house. He just knows what looks good. He is what you could call a life artist. He has an idea of how life should be, how the world around him should look, and he molds his reality to meet that image. He reads books just partially open to avoid breaking the spine. He buys five matching jackets so that the family can color coordinate in a photograph. He dyes Mom’s hair so she’ll look like Dolly Parton. He spends a whole year planning and anticipating vacations, looking for bargains,

# He dyes Mom's hair so she'll look like Dolly Parton.

dreaming about destinations. He forbids shoes on the carpet, nails in the wall, and ballpoint pens in the car to ward against preventable blemishes. He spends entire weekends maintaining the treacherous ravine that is our yard, an area that isn't even visible from the street but, he believes, is still a visible indicator of the neat life within the home. I once found him passed out from heat exhaustion in the dog's beanbag bed in the garage, his lawnmower and two empty Dr. Pepper cans next to him.

No matter how many times things fall apart, how many plans don't work out, how many times the dog pukes on the carpet or the sailboat turns over, Dad keeps that perfect image in his mind and strives ever towards it. In his mind it is beautiful.

in first runner-up. Not good enough. Thirty years later, that failure still harasses his mind. Yet he has not become jaded as so many other adults do. Life, he believes, is as exciting and promising right now as it ever was. He copes by refusing to acknowledge the reality of disease, sadness, and pain. No matter how many times things fall apart, how many plans don't work out, how many times the dog pukes on the carpet or the sailboat turns over, Dad keeps that perfect image in his mind and strives ever towards it. In his mind it is beautiful.

I was not three weeks old when Dad decided how he wanted our adult relationship to be. He'd sat on an airplane next to a man and his daughter who looked to be about twenty-three years old. The pair was engrossed in a real conversation and seemed to really enjoy each other's company. They had talked about *The Color Purple*, about Ronald Reagan's address to the Japanese Diet, about a project the man was working on at the office, about *The Right Stuff*, a movie they'd watched together the night before. "I can't wait till Ashley's that old," Dad had told Mom when he got home. "I can't wait till we talk together like that."

But Dad loved every stage of childrearing. He loved having someone to do things with. When they were younger, he could persuade Mom into playing catch, sailing, parasailing, but Mom became more cautious with age and motherhood. So, once we were old enough, Dad had us kids fill that void. Our play day with Dad was Saturdays, the morning that Mom taught

business law at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He piled me, Preston, and Mae our cocker spaniel into his black Z car with the leather that smelled like baseball field clay. With Preston and me packed in the tiny back seats, Mae in the front seat, two paws perched on the open window and her tongue flapping at passing traffic, Dad sang “Help me Ronda, yeah. Get her out of my heart” all the way to the Shop-A-Snack. Dad grabbed half a gallon of chocolate whole milk from the frosty, sliding door refrigerator while Preston and I carefully selected the twelve donuts that had a sufficient amount of icing. We each then chose one item of candy a piece to save for a mid-morning snack. Gummy worms for Preston, Twix for me, two handfuls of fireballs for Dad. Then we piled back in the car and cruised down the street to Overton Park, where we claimed a picnic table for our breakfast.

We pulled out the dozen donuts, all soft and glued together with sugary paste inside the cardboard box. Preston and I each ate two, Mae one, and Dad easily finished off the rest. Licking our fingers, we passed around the half-gallon of chocolate whole milk, taking long swigs of it straight from the carton. After Preston and I had what we wanted, Dad threw back his head and chugged. I watched his Adam’s apple pulsing and heard the milk washing down his gullet, gulp after gulp. He didn’t stop until he’d drained it. Dad set the empty jug down triumphantly, rivulets of brown stuff starting to dry all crusty on either side of his mouth.

Dad can’t stand to waste. He’ll consume soured milk, burnt toast, or expired orange juice if he thinks it will be thrown out. His favorite restaurants are those like O’Charlie’s and Logan’s Roadhouse in which he can eat free peanuts and dinner rolls and then take his entrée, untouched, to go. Two meals for the price of one. But while he will eat just about anything to keep it from going to waste, he is, at the same time, very particular about food. He eats very little Italian, Mexican, fresh vegetables, no Chinese, no cakes with cream cheese frosting, no sour cream, no gravy, nothing unidentifiable, nothing exotic or unusual, absolutely no cheese. The food must be visually appetizing. It must not touch the neighboring dishes. Perhaps because he is such a creature of habit, he eats only what he grew up eating—hotdogs, hamburgers, barbecue chips, French fries, mashed potatoes, meatloaf, canned vegetables, Frosted Flakes, Klondike Bars, lemonade, Dr. Pepper, Mayonnaise, Rice Krispies, peanut butter and jelly, chili, chicken fingers, and whole chocolate milk. At El Paso Corporation, his colleagues call him the Chick-fil-A man because at lunch he’s walked across the street

for a chicken sandwich everyday since the restaurant opened fifteen years ago. When it comes to food, Dad doesn't need variety. It doesn't have to taste great, but it does have to look good.

This Christmas I wasn't halfway through my dressing at the Holiday Inn Christmas buffet when I noticed that Dad was eating a dinner plate piled with what could have easily have been eighty overcooked fragments of fried bacon. "My God, Dad," I said. He looked at me, a greasy crisp suspended in mid air between a slick thumb and forefinger. "Aren't you going to eat anything besides bacon?" He popped the meat in his mouth and smiled.

"It's cooked just how I like it. It's perfect," he said, reaching for another. He closed his eyes and chewed with slow exaggeration. "Really, you should get some of this." I shook my head. It wasn't long before he got up for a second plateful of it.

Once while he was in law school, Dad and Mom had attended a pre-game spaghetti dinner party at the home of another couple. Dad, of course, didn't eat spaghetti. When they got to the game, he assumed that everyone was as hungry as he was. He bought 13 hotdogs and carried them back to the group. "Who wants a dog?" he said. Of course, everybody else had eaten at the dinner party. Dad is forever generous, but he has a hard time seeing things from other people's perspectives. He ate all thirteen himself.

When we were done with our Saturday morning picnic breakfast at the park, Dad pulled out the Frisbee and football in the hopes that Preston and I would throw with him rather than join the other kids on the swing set and monkey bars. He was never content to sit on the bench and talk with the other parents. He was at the park and he wanted to play. Dad was great so long as things went well, but if anything bad happened, it was back to Mom. He is no good when it comes to emergencies. He hates illness, injury, blood, needles. He worries over a single sneeze, an unzipped jacket. He abhors the doctor's office and hasn't been to the dentist in over a decade. Mom says that with his diet and stress level, he should be dead by now. But whether it's Dad's good genes, his meticulous personal hygiene, or luck, he is 5'11", 210 pounds, and has been for years. He has surprisingly good blood pressure and only a couple of cavities.

One Saturday morning when I was three, a bully pushed me off the playground set. The fall split a gash in my forehead, and I began to bleed

He'll consume  
soured Milk,  
burnt toast, or  
expired orange  
juice if he thinks  
it will be thrown  
out.

profusely. Dad picked me up and threw me into the car, but instead of taking me to the emergency room where I belonged, he took me to the university where Mom was teaching business law. Students and professors stopped and stared as Dad ran down the hall holding me, a hysterical, bleeding, and diaper-soiled baby, out in front of him at arms length. He ran all the way to Mom's door, knocked, held me up to the little window at the top of the door, and entered the classroom. He headed straight down the middle aisle of desks and handed me off to Mom whose pen was still poised atop the projector. She dismissed class and took me to the hospital. Dad sat, fingers knotted, in the waiting room and refused to go with Mom while I got stitches. But that night he checked on me up every couple of hours to see if I had a concussion. He woke me, picked me up, held me to his chest, and waltzed me back to sleep.

It was often that way. I quickly learned to take my problems and worries to Mom because she's the one who can cope, who can function under pressure. But Dad was always there, always loyal and oftentimes calming.

Mom fell in love with Dad because he was brilliant and outgoing. If there's one person on earth who knows all his quirks and comes the closest to understanding them, it's her. She lets Dad dye her hair, not because she's brainlessly submissive, but because she knows that when Dad's world is in order, when things are as they should be, he is happier, more content, more pleasant to be around, and less likely to take his frustration out on us kids. My whole life Mom has tried to shield us from Dad's idiosyncrasies and keep him from having too much of an impact on us. She was never worried that we would adopt his unhealthy eating habits or that he would be abusive, but

she did worry that his exactingness would be psychologically and emotionally demanding on us. He wanted perfection. She wanted happy, confident kids.

When I was in Kindergarten, I once went to Dad with a coloring homework assignment. The picture was of a house with a shaggy dog sitting by a car in the driveway. I had already decided that the picture would depict our own house, so I wanted to know what color to use for the car. Mom had a tan car. Dad's was black. Instead of telling me that either color was fine or to use my imagination, Dad said, "Bring me your crayons. We'll do it together." The two of us sat at the kitchen table and bent over the page. A crayon nub clinched in my fist, I rubbed vigorously at the paper and squinted at my work in concentration. Dad held his crayon in the crook of his steady, neat fingers and went behind me, filling in my rough job. With his green crayon he bore down extra hard to cover the stray red mark I'd made on the grass. He then helped me sign my name at the top at the sheet. I held the masterpiece carefully in my hands and examined it. It was beautiful. I ran into the laundry room where Mom was just starting a load of darks and held it up for her to see. She took it from me. "Pat," she yelled loud enough to be heard in the kitchen. Dad was already coming into the laundry room, ready to explain.

"I was just helping her," he said.

"You're supposed to help her with her homework, not do it for her. How is she supposed to turn this in?" Mom asked, waving the art. "It's not a child's work."

As I got older, I stopped taking homework to Dad, fearing his extensive forty-five-minute explanation that was I was sure to receive for even the simplest question. He always seemed to make things more complicated than they needed to be. But he loved helping, contributing, and putting his computer skills to work. Many times when it got out that I was working on a presentation, a project, or running for a school office, Dad would stay up all night tinkering with and cussing at his computer. The next morning I'd wake up to find that he'd left a beautiful banner or visual aid outside my bedroom door. I never knew how to thank him because I never really asked him to do it. But I knew that it had taken him hours and I felt deeply guilty.

At some point, Mom stopped having to separate me from Dad; I did it myself. Not only did I stop asking for his help with homework, I actually began to resent him. I became wary of what I used to think were his funny

peculiarities. He stopped seeming comical and more closed-minded, controlling. I was embittered that he dyed Mom's hair, that he wouldn't let me hang posters in my room for fear it might peel the paint. I didn't understand him, and I thought Mom weak for not standing up to him more than she did. But there was never much of a rebellious streak in me. I never shot heroine, failed out of school, highlighted my hair orange, or, God forbid it, ran through the halls with a Sharpie marker. In fact, I did quite well academically and never even gave my parents any real cause to punish me. I demanded the same level of performance from myself that he would have, had Mom let him. There was more of him in me than at times I wanted to admit and, despite my irritation, I still wanted his approval. I wanted him to be proud of me.

Most of the time my resentment was silent. I scowled bitterly over my after school snack as I watched Dad open Mom's mail and chunk in the garbage that which he decided was junk mail—mainly catalogues that I was sure she would enjoy looking through. He was knowingly doing something she'd asked him many times not to do, but the letters were cluttering her desk and he couldn't resist. Once he left the room, I quietly fished the catalogues out of the garbage and put them back on the desk where Mom had left them. I finished my cheese and crackers, reassuring myself that I would not get stuck in the mess. I would always open my own mail. If this was what marriage was about, I swore I would have none of it.

On my eighteenth birthday, I was allowed to have my two best friends spend the night. After the end of our late night movie, we crawled out of our sleeping bags and crept silently down stairs for some cake. Anna and I sat at the kitchen counter in bar stools. Nancy claimed the more comfortable cushioned swivel chair at Mom's desk, the chair Dad had forbidden me to sit in for fear I might knock a nick in the cabinet. I didn't want to tell Nancy that she couldn't sit in the chair. It was an absurd rule and surely she, a guest, was an exception to it. She wasn't even swiveling. I don't remember what we talked about—my boyfriend problems, Anna's soccer scholarship, Nancy's annoying little brothers—but it wasn't ten minutes before we heard Dad's heavy, bare feet on the wooden stairs. Nancy and Anna looked at each other. What would bring him downstairs to confront us at two in the morning? I had a good guess. Of course, we weren't doing anything wrong, but when Dad entered, blinking in the kitchen light, he met

three faces that portrayed such dread that we might have been caught smoking pot.

“We don’t sit in the chair, Nancy,” he said. “Ashley should have told you that.” Nancy picked up her plate, pushed in the chair, and moved to the counter with Anna and me. “Goodnight,” said Dad, turning and heading back upstairs.

We sat in silence for awhile afterward, picking at our cake. “I’m sorry,” I told Nancy. The ice machine kicked on.

“I’m tired,” said Nancy. “Let’s just go to bed.”

My friends have generally always liked my Dad, comparing him to Chevy Chase, the wacky family man from National Lampoon’s Vacation movies. They think that Dad is funnier and more outgoing than my mom and, of the two of them, he’s usually more openly pleased to see them. Dad is more prone to ask them about their summer jobs or recent vacation. But those friends who spend too much time at my house, who might overhear an outburst or who catch a hint of something under his genial surface, begin to wonder about him. They’re not scared, but they’re not comfortable. I rinsed the dessert plates and stacked them in the sink.

The next morning when I told Mom about the incident, she reminded me that Anna’s parents were splitting, that Nancy’s dad couldn’t hold a job. “Your father is a good man,” she said. “He cares about you.” Even then I knew that she was right.

He’s taken off work to attend every play, honor program, and recital that I’ve ever been in. I played in the band for ten years, and he came to every single football game and most every basketball game. When I did community theatre, he built the sets and ran the spotlights. When I started college he took me to Honors’ Day and freshman orientation by himself and moved me into my dorm room while Mom sat in the car. He did it because Mom couldn’t; it would have made her too sad. But he also did it because he was proud of me and he was excited. He wanted to be apart of it all. He designed my wedding invitations and programs himself on the computer. He made a 400-picture slide show of my fiancé and me growing up to show at the reception. When I come home every so often to practice the piano, Mom worries about disturbing me. Dad walks right into the room and kisses me on the top of my head.

"It's good to have music in the house," he says. "It's good to have you home." I hug him. Until very recently, it was something we did not often do after I reached puberty.

I've always known that he is proud of me. After all Mom's worrying, I don't think that Dad's quirks and expectations have damaged me. I am happy with the way I turned out, which is not that much unlike them. I am a peacemaker, like Mom. I share Dad's love of writing, his need for organization, his affinity for adventure and travel. I was, after all, the only one interested in getting on that catamaran. I have wondered, however, if we're as close as Dad had hoped we would be on the plane twenty-two years ago. I've worried that he's giving me away before I even really understand him. In fact, there aren't many people that do understand him. Dad has the acquaintance and the respect of many, but no close friend, no true confidant. His eccentricities and passions don't lend themselves to intimacy. We can talk comfortably about movies, classes, work, and journalism—our shared passion—but I have never had a significant conversation with him about religion, worries, love, grief, or anything else that's really important. He is not prone to expose his weaknesses or his emotions to others, and I am pretty guarded myself.

After four years of college and a little bit of distance from my Dad, I still don't understand him, but I stopped viewing him as critically as I once did. He's enriched my life in ways that I am only now beginning to appreciate. With what little experience I have in the real world, I've begun to realize the rarity of his vitality and passion and just how easily that is lost in the daily repetition and frustration of everyday life. Somehow, he never lost it and, after all my adolescent grumbling, it is this stubborn hardheadedness that I cling to.

I am beginning to understand why Dad spent those nights helping me with my school projects. He wanted to do something, anything, for me. It was his way of loving me. He couldn't really talk to me, but he could do that. Maybe Dad wasn't asking for the impossible. After all, that couple on the plane was only talking about books. Maybe this is enough for now, our silent understanding.

Chris Daniel

### I WATCHED MY RELATIONSHIP FISHTAIL

I watched my relationship careen off Elizabeth's  
Vermouth bitten lips,  
And fall headlong onto the magazine covered sofa.

I swung wide in the first turn and lost all footing,  
Kissing each paved argument and snappy concrete retort,  
Falling further behind with each tap of her foot and exhale of smoke.

I watched my relationship fishtail into  
A chain-link fence  
That I had long since forgotten, and  
That mashed my skin into cut diamonds of anger and  
Pit driven hollows in the center of my stomach

I bit at my Ritz cracker, and  
Crumbled into my wine glass steering wheel,  
Eyes darting away from all of the inevitable incoming traffic.

And from my blue arm chair  
With a flash of jean skirt and wrinkled T-Shirt  
I watched my relationship finish late and leave early..



Carrie Tompkins, REPOSE

## SEIZURE

My body becomes a storm.  
I am not there, nor anywhere;  
I was chased out  
by the clanging of electricity  
ringing through my brain.  
The primal groan that brews in my belly  
portends the coming tempest.

Jim holds my head  
until the shaking subsides.  
As the voltage drops  
the system reboots  
and I do not answer  
but slowly.

All I know is what he's told me:  
The way my terrified eyes  
look up at him like I know  
what's about to

happen my limbs jerking  
as my body struggles to grasp air,  
A moan  
pushed proof of my bitten tongue  
to my lips, a bloody foam betraying  
my gnashing teeth.  
My shoulder creaked stridently  
like a twisted rope  
stretched taut.

We talked over bread, oil, and pinot grigio  
Jim was scared, gentle  
optimistic; he says it might  
not happen again

But I am the captain  
of a mutinous body.  
I cannot control it.  
Jim cannot protect me.

I know that one day  
my teeth may hack my tongue  
clean off  
and I will never speak again.



Larry Denmark, MOTHER EARTH #2

### PICTURE DAY

Steam rises from the metal clamps  
as I struggle  
to iron out the kinks and  
wrinkles and  
unruly  
differences  
nature gave me.

Curling iron holds all it can  
bear to grasp, its hinges  
shaking,  
screaming  
to release  
the mess  
that taunts  
its power.

Gel doesn't work anymore,  
slicking my wayward curls  
against my scalp in *straight*  
comb-induced rows with a clasp.

I pull and smooth,  
comb and stroke  
my hair with great skill  
and mastery.

Soon I will look like Mary Hunter  
and Alma Lacey,  
plastic and predictable.

But tonight, after I wash out the façade,  
towel dry upside down and flip,  
I will look in the mirror  
and I will see myself with my  
crazy  
kinky  
curly  
mess



Keith Rogers, WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN MY FRIDGE?



Tyler Sasser Cook, CURVY LIGHT

Sarah Bauman

### STORY OF “THE WHITE GIRL”

She gathered flowers that morning;  
Slicing stems with the precision of a surgeon,  
Carefully compiling a rich bouquet of astors,  
Their whiskery faces smiling up at her,  
Caressing her face as she breathed in their subtle scent.

She pulled on the dress slowly, savoring the experience-  
The rasp of lace on her skin,  
The way the skirt draped over her hips;  
The tulle underneath lightly scratching her thighs,  
How the bodice dipped in at her waist and tied with an elegant bow.  
Her hair she left unbound  
A cascading wave down her back;  
Curls stark against the white of the fabric.

She waited in the parlor with the priest and her guardian;  
The bearskin rug swallowing her feet, its softness anchoring her to reality,  
To the fact that he wasn't coming.  
The flowers she so lovingly gathered fell unnoticed from her nerveless grasp  
Scattering on the plush oriental carpet;  
Their beauty tainted,  
Their hopeful faces faintly obscene.

## ELEGY IN BREAD AND WATER

The dusts lift themselves from the wooden planks  
Upon which they have been tossed and  
Formed  
To derive from its coughing, tousled page  
A blot of bread  
A cask of cake  
The dusts lift themselves from the wooden planks  
Upon which they have been tossed and  
Cast  
Lifted thus, they breathe, stammering of wind, into the  
Fiery and thrumming maw of the  
Oven  
To sigh with swirling and heavy gusts even unto the furnace.  
To sigh these: "We are well fed"

So also

May she pass

May she pass  
As the casements, glossed of starlight and satire,  
Beat against the winded gusts, which,  
Heaving,  
Pronounce themselves defended sufficiently,  
Slinking sleepily,  
The sparkling twine of its constellation  
Strung  
Limping back to its oozing, hot configuration.

Defended sufficiently from that  
Grand and  
Sparkling  
Lemony  
Fortification from which the bread flows and the rivers sing in  
Gurgling chorus  
From the tap unto table

The tap caked with sweet and swaying  
Fingers  
Of moss whose green and delicate articulation usher forth  
From the rambling faucet the women, the passed, the aunts and dames, who bleat and  
Drip from the  
Whining and  
Churning  
Mechanism

So also...

They pluck from the paper stacked atop the table  
Great fists of coupons and  
So also  
Do they lift her, she who has passed against the gleaming tide of cleaner and parchment  
With bones of jelly and  
Eyes of butter  
Dug in bloody swaths  
To satisfy the children  
The mewling, sweet children

So also

Do they lift her, she who has passed before the yawning bread-forge  
That stung her,  
Melted her yellow, milky eyes.

So also

Do they lift from the snapping, gibbering mouth of the lurid oven  
Her bread and from it they render forth for her body  
The Vessel,  
Send it forth across the silent womb of the sink  
To the vast Seas thereupon.

So away may she pass against the gray and happy horizon  
In the Bread  
In The Vessel,  
Crusts cleanly cut.

Away may she pass  
We are well fed.  
God attend her wake.  
We are well fed.

Megan Roth

DAD IS

An alcoholic,  
But he's nice too.  
And he will table-talk you  
Over Wednesday fish,  
While he swivels his pinky finger  
Through crushed ice, and

He will pound on about  
Graduate school and degrees,  
Movers and shakers,  
Doers and watchers,  
While he punches his Palm Pilot  
After nine.

The table will sweat beads under  
His melting concoction,  
And the olives will glance up  
Shivering and bored,  
Because they've risen and sunk  
Seven times.

I watch his eyelids  
Waxing and waning, until  
His head takes the final nod,  
Snoring into his umbra,  
His body resting upright  
Over Wednesday fish.

This makes it easy  
To remove the small-frame glasses  
From his nose,  
And stare through the lenses at  
The giant snowflake Christmas lights.



Moriah Osborn, RIVETING PILLOWTALK

Kate Brantley

# MOMIE'S HOUSE

As a child, I spent some of the longest hours of my life sitting by the bedside of my gray, disintegrating great-grandmother. Momie (pronounced mah-mee) was in her 90's and fighting a losing battle with Alzheimer's. My grandmother took me and my older brother John over to Momie's museum-like house about once a week to sit by the electric hospital bed in her room as she asked us our names and ages in succession all afternoon. It seemed that as soon as we finished answering, she would have already forgotten. "You don't know how much it means to her," said Gran. Momie's questions seemed to prove the contrary.

Rumor in our family is that before she became senile, Momie was the sassiest and most capable woman in Mississippi. She told everyone what to do all of the time, and she single-handedly ran her household, worked at the Highway Department, and ran her husband's campaign for State Land Commissioner. But Alzheimer's took its toll, and eventually the family got together and decided that it was time for her to leave her house and move into a nursing home. Gran still made me visit her, though now visits



Natalie Bruce, VOLUNTEER PARK ARBORTOREUM

divan,” “19<sup>th</sup> century mahogany curio,” and “hand-painted Limoges bowl” became present in our conversations, though the context was likely to be, “Children, stop jumping on the brocade divan,” “Kate, stop hiding in the 19<sup>th</sup> century mahogany curio;” or “John, get your half-eaten popsicle out of the hand-painted Limoges bowl.”

My Lebanese grandmother has an Arabic word for exploring the contents of drawers and cabinets. She calls it “nubbishing.” There was plenty to nubbish in Momie’s house. There were old letters to read, ancient magazines to go through, pictures to look at, and fragile knick-knacks to leave my fingerprints on. I turned nubbishing into an art form. Through stacks of old letters tied with string, I discovered that before she gained the nickname “Momie,” she went by Fanny Graham, and she had sisters with funny names like Edress, Zora, and Myrtis. Sometimes I recognized people in the pictures like mean great-aunt Patsy, smelly great-Uncle Bill, young versions of Gran, or Momie before she had that vacancy in her eyes, but usually I didn’t know who they were. I could always differentiate the older photos, though, because that was before people knew that they were supposed to smile when having their picture taken. Sometimes I would spread the pictures out like puzzles pieces and try to figure out where I fit in when most of the people in the pictures didn’t know or remember me.

Whenever I got tired of nubbishing through the house, I sat in my favorite rocker and admired the two paintings of Spanish ladies on the wall in the living room. One wore an enormous pink hoop dress and the other one a blue one. They were very beautiful and sat in front of bullfighting scenes, holding their fans and giggling coquettishly. Amid the spectators in the picture who watched the fight, the ladies looked blissfully unconcerned, facing away from the action. As I sat in my rocker watching them, I prayed that when I grew up, my hair would curl just like theirs.

In the center of the house was a staircase that led to nowhere. After her husband had died, Momie, the enterprising woman that she was, decided that she could rent out the upstairs and make some extra money. She had the top of the stairs cemented off and had a stairway built along the outside of the house. Now that Momie was in the nursing home, my grandmother kept renting out the upstairs, and the obsolete staircase remained in the middle of the house. This staircase was not the discouraging physical metaphor that it is to me today, but instead my own, private clubhouse since no one else ever bothered to go up there. This was an odd choice for a private clubhouse, considering that it was the most visible point in the entire house. Nonetheless, I spent many evenings at the top of those stairs wrapped in blankets and reading about the Boxcar children or writing in my diary as if no one could see me.

The house had two bedrooms: Momie’s former bedroom, which still contained her electric hospital bed, and a guest bedroom, which had two tall, intricately carved wooden beds. Momie’s room had the only TV in the house. With no qualms about diving into the bed we had sat beside so many awful afternoons before, John and I battled over who got to sit in the hospital bed and raise the back of it to a perfect TV-watching angle. The table where she used to put her dentures was the perfect place to put an afternoon snack. The struggle for the hospital bed did not end in the afternoons. Every night John and I fought over who would get to sleep in it. My mom usually rewarded this privilege to John due to his four-year seniority—one of life’s great unfairnesses. Each time that I did get to sleep in

# **When I was about four, Mom came home from the grocery store to find Daddy hurling her belongings in the middle of the driveway and me dragging her jewelry box upstairs trying to save it from him-- “like a little Joan of Arc,” she said.**

it, I ended up having nightmares of Momie’s slow corrosion there, and I spent the whole night elevating and lowering the bed and putting it into every configuration imaginable. Without fail I ended up with the bed in a perfect V shape, curled up in a protective ball like a roly-poly in the middle. But I argued with my brother over the right to sleep in it every night. I wanted it because he wanted it.

For a nervous seven-year old like me, Momie’s house was full of terrors. After staying at the house for several weeks, John discovered that one of the long, intricately carved dowels that was part of a headboard in the guest bedrooms was detachable. Whenever Mom was out for a walk or on any other errand, John would grab the huge dowel, and chase me around the house with it. I soon learned every hiding place imaginable in the house. I would hide in the many closets, squished between musty old fur coats, in the closet under the stairs where we kept the washer and dryer, wedged between go visit Momie, who seemed to get progressively worse, even forgetting who Gran was sometimes. “My mom and dad are coming to pick me up soon,” she insisted.

On the other afternoons, Gran would pull out her albums of pictures, and we’d look at pictures of my Dad and Uncle Steve in little cowboy outfits or the people who I’d seen in the pictures at Momie’s house. She’d pull out newspaper clippings that had been folded and re-folded of Momie’s husband who had been State Land Commissioner and of my great-great Uncle Mike Connor, who had been governor. “You have a lot to be proud of,” she’d say.

Mom came to pick us up when she got off work, and after she greeted Gran curtly, we piled into her car and headed back to Momie’s house. When we got back to Momie’s house, Mom often took us on walks around the neighborhood. We admired the other porched houses, waved to the women as old as Momie sitting on their porches, and picked and cracked pecans that we found on the sidewalk. Sometimes we would walk over to Millsaps and watch their soccer team practice since John was an elementary school soccer star. In the evenings, Mom graded papers; John did homework, and I sat in safety at the top of the stairs.

One evening a few weeks after we had moved in, my mom suggested that we go meet the woman who lived upstairs and take her some of the chocolate cookies we’d made earlier that day. Without hesitation the three of us left the house excited to unravel the mystery of our upstairs neighbor, climbed the green wooden stairs along the side of the house, and knocked at the door. We heard the sound of a woman’s voice trying to control her pet, and she opened the door—a pale girl in her mid-twenties with short dark hair. I

looked around the house at her modern furnishings, the Pearl Jam and Janis Joplin posters on the walls, and wondered how this was part of the same house. Soon, I snapped out of my thoughtful state, looked down, and realized that the animal she was having trouble restraining was a pig. She finally successfully corralled it into a wooden pen in the corner.

"Hi, I'm Melissa...and this is Charlotte," she said, pointing her elbow towards the pig.

"I'm Mary, and this is Kate, and John. We live downstairs. We decided it was time we met our upstairs neighbor."

"Yeah, I've seen you guys, and I have been meaning to go down and officially meet y'all. Do you want to come in?"

As we entered the apartment tentatively, my mom made conversation, "Do you go to Millsaps or Belhaven?"

"I graduated from Millsaps a few years ago, but now I work for a law firm downtown. I'm originally from Hattiesburg. My family has a farm there, and that's how Charlotte ended up here. What do you do?"

"I teach English at Holmes Community College in Ridgeland, and Kate and John go to St. Richards."

I summoned my courage. "Can I pet her?" I said.

"Sure. She's really sweet. You guys can probably hear her down there when she runs around up here." She said quietly to my mom, "You won't tell Mrs. Bobbey about this, will you?"

My mom, who did not mind hiding anything from my dad's mom, agreed. I crept over to the makeshift pen made out of two-by-fours and petted the rough, slightly hairy black and pink skin of the pig, and it sniffled my hand. After a few minutes, my mom politely said it was time to go, and we all said good-bye to Melissa and Charlotte, laughing at our knowledge of our upstairs neighbors.

One day a few weeks later as I sprawled out on a green brocaded divan and John lay out on the floor, trying to find pictures in ancient National Geographics that would gross me out, Mom entered with an eerily serious look on her face. "Kids, I don't want y'all to blame yourselves for any of this so I'm going to send y'all to see Dr. Herzog." Dr. Herzog was a psychiatrist and also the father of my classmate and fellow Girl Scout, Anna.

"But, Mom, I really don't blame myself," I whined.

Despite, my complaints, a week later Mom got off of work early and took John and me to Dr. Herzog's office. In the waiting room, John headed straight for the magazines, but I was too old play with the toys and too young to read the magazines. I sat in a stiff wooden chair in the corner, eying a painting on the wall of two kids looking guiltily at a vase that they had broken. I sat there for hours waiting my turn to go in, all the while becoming more and more stressed out for the girl with the fluffy red hair and white pinafore, and the small boy with the brown knickers. What would they do? Would they be punished? I broke out into a cool sweat imagining all of the horrible narratives that could spring from the painting.

After John had exhausted that month's copy of Boy's Life he came and sat down beside me. He looked frightened too. After a few minutes, I managed to squeeze out the pressing question on my mind, "So John, your 12<sup>th</sup> birthday is this year...what are you

going to do?" For children of divorced (or soon-to-be-divorced) parents, the age of twelve is a watershed year, just like sixteen, eighteen, and twenty-one for everyone else. Twelve is when you get to decide which parent you want to live with.

"Yeah, I'm going to live with Dad."

"Really? Why?"

"Well, I don't like living with Mom. Plus, I think Dad needs me."

By the time I got to Dr. Herzog's office, I was on edge from the unnerving painting and the realization that as of February, I wouldn't have a brother. Dr. Herzog had one of those soothing calm voices, but that put me on the edge more than anything. He offered me a coke then led me back to his office. Pictures of his own normal family, including his daughter, my friend Anna, were all over the room. After several minutes of him making me awkwardly talk about my emotions, Dr. Herzog reached into a closet and pulled out a box of hand puppets.

"Now, Kate, we're going to do some role playing. Do you know what that is?" I shook my head.

"That's when you pretend to be someone else. With these hand puppets, you're going to pretend to be your mom, and I'm going to be you." He pushed the box of puppets toward me. "Take your pick." I grabbed a panda that was sitting in the top of the box, and he grabbed an owl. Silence ensued.

"Well, what's something that your mom would say to you?" he inquired patiently.

"I dunno...she might tell me to clean up my room."

"Alright well then let's start with that. How does that make you feel?"

"I dunno...not happy, I guess." I kept my eyes glued to the floor so he couldn't see the tears of frustration and indignation brimming in my eyes.

"Kate, do you think that this divorce is your fault?"

I accidentally let out a stray sniffle, and Dr. Herzog reached back and smugly grabbed a box of tissues from his desk, taking my tears as some sort of successful emotional penetration. I spent the rest of the visit crying and giving one-word answers to his awful questions. After an eternity, he told me that the visit was over, but not to worry, we'd have another visit soon.

During another one of my visits, Dr. Herzog left me in a room by myself and told me to draw a picture of my family. I think that he must have expected me to draw one of my family members as a monster or carrying a bloody knife or something. I worried that if I didn't draw someone just right, that Dr. Herzog was going construe it as some sort of repressed animosity towards them. I spent the whole time in a cold sweat, drawing, erasing, and redrawing the picture, worried that my inability to draw my dad's head as perfectly round would lead to his decision that I was crazy. After these visits, I went up to my nook on the stairs and scribbled angrily in my diary.

Every few weekends, Mom begrudgingly took John and me back home to stay with Dad. On the first weekend we went, Mom drove up and we discovered that Dad had traded in his old Buick LeSabre for a fancy teal T-top Camaro. He had also retiled the kitchen and bought a hot tub.

In an attempt to get rid of traces of my mom, Dad decided to rip out her vanity table and put a window in that wall. After he had ripped out the counter top, he handed me the hammer and instructed me to knock down the wall. I took the first swing hesitantly, but after that I attacked it with voracity, tears streaming down my face, destroying the vanity whose counter I used to hide under after running around the house naked with Mom chasing me trying to make me take my prescription medicines. I destroyed it with anger for the divorce, for their forgetting about me, forgetting to feed me, anger for the uprooting, anger for the quiet, awful, desperation of having to talk about my emotions with Dr. Herzog, anger for having to talk with hand puppets, and because I knew that it wasn't my fault.

For a few weeks in November, custody of the houses switched. Mom moved back into our old house, and Daddy couldn't handle living with Mom so he moved into Momie's house. But Daddy didn't give up the house without a fight. He turned off all of the lights in the house and told my mom that he hadn't paid the electric bill. He also locked her out of the master bedroom. As the mischievous seven-year-old that I was, I knew how to pick the lock, of course, and showed her how. (You should have heard Daddy yelling at me later when he found out I told her.) Once in the room, Mom discovered that Dad had sold their bed and saw the newly installed window where her vanity had been. Left bedless, my mom spent those nights in my pink upstairs bedroom under my floral comforter with me.

The house was a wreck. There were books everywhere. Mom was an English teacher, and Daddy just had lots of books, and there were hundreds and hundreds of them in piles or in boxes marked "Mary" or "Jack." I nubbished through the house violently, looking for familiar random objects in the places I knew they were supposed to be: Daddy's tobacco in the table beside his big leather chair, John's and my baptismal candles in a box in Mom's closet, home videos of Christmases past in the cabinet in the hall. But nothing was in its right place.

Once the divorce was final in December, Dad regained custody of the house since he was the one who could afford to keep it. Mom moved back into Momie's house until she could find a house for her and me. I was relieved. I couldn't stand living in my house when nothing was right, and I missed the Spanish ladies and my nook at the top of Momie's stairs.

That Christmas Eve, after we had decorated the Charlie Brown Christmas tree that my mom had bought from Fred's Drug Store, Mom took a nap so that she could make it through midnight mass. For a few minutes John and I sat in silence. John looked more calculating than usual.

"Hey, Kate, you don't want to go to church, do you?" he whispered.

"No. But how would we get out of it?" I was suspicious of any plan that my brother had cooked up.

"We could set back all the clocks in the house."

I knew that the only reason that John didn't want to go to church was because it would be our first Christmas mass as an undone family, but I didn't want to go either and agreed.

John and I crept through the house ceremoniously, careful to avoid the spots in the floor that we knew would creak. I turned back Mom's alarm, and John took care of the rest, the ceramic, wooden, and bronze clocks clicking all over the house.

Then we tiptoed to the living room, whispering excitedly at our genius. As was our tradition, we shook each and every one of our presents, excited, even Mom had said it would be "a small Christmas this year." Pumped full of the exhilaration of both our mischief and Christmas itself, John and I couldn't sleep that night. We lay down on the plush floral vines of the living room carpet and listened to the sound of the pig running back and forth as the Spanish ladies watched from the wall, laughing.

### THE COLORED THINGS I'VE HELD

There are bones with which my hands are clad and tied  
And gloved therein are things I keep,  
But frost,  
New frost,  
As flaked from grimaced moon  
And dusk, where shadows champ against their stooping breads—  
Mountains sogged in ice, asleep and black beneath the dozing, starry tacks  
That wink and rivet sky where sky must babble blue until she come undone—  
This frost has pinned the bones against my eyes,  
And I have rubbed the cakes of glossy tear,  
And sickles thin and cold slide chilly slits around my neck,  
And there I see the colored things my palms have held,  
Though now bereft and grayed by paling frost.

These colored things my palms have held:

I've patted mewling spittle to her chin,  
Like dribbled milk from pointed breast,  
And napkins, silk, have slaked themselves on that maternal grin.

Weeds I've held and picked bouquets of clotted clay  
From roots disheveled in its shelf of mud and wondered why,  
Why golden dandelion diadems have packaged scorn in coronets  
Too fine for brows of lesser make than mountains robed  
In creeping cliffs of ice, aurora-shorn and woven in the starry loom.  
Why have adults hacked the dandelion loose  
And cursed the stubborn maw of earth, though gold it grins?

And even frost I've held and thought it diamond cut  
In geometric wonder— almost random, almost.  
I knew it blinked in colors wild, where worlds too small to see were  
Slopped apart when heated blades  
Of morning curl down from the sun and mince the frost to wetted shreds.  
I knew the prism colors winked with worlds,  
Alas, too small to see, so I have pressed  
My lashes nearest to the rainbow lights  
And fancied, there, I saw another peering back  
Until my blinking batted heat into the cooler salve,  
And how I wished to stay there where the colors flash.

But now I stay and see it clear: the frost is hollow to its ashen bone,  
And childish things as other worlds have slinked away  
Like smoggy ice into the puddle.  
Sickles thin and cold slide chilly slits around my neck,  
And there I see the colored things my palms have held,  
Though now bereft and grayed by paling frost.



Lauren Cook, FIGURE



Elizabeth Wilson, MOPS

# Reese Julian

# THE MURDERER

Something had changed after Norman Slate had awoken one day. John the milkman had not made his morning delivery, nor had he greeted Norman with his usual, "Howdy Doody, Mr. Slate!" The Slate family cat, Mittens, along with her two kittens, Furball and Bumpkins, had failed to stalk the hallway outside of Norman's room. Norman Jr. had disappeared from his usual post as well. He should have been awaiting his sleepy father's arrival into the kitchen to discuss the duo searching for dragons and giants in the woods behind their house. Norman's wife, Gilda, who had made such a wedding vow as "I'll always be there for you," had become absent with everything else. He had thought she loved breakfast. Norman had scratched his beautiful head of blonde hair, and remained floating through a ghostly house whose appearance seemed to be slowly dissipating.

Gilda barked for him to take a right as Norman found himself behind the wheel of his tan colored Ford Taurus station wagon with a packed luggage rack. Next to him Gilda sat donned in sandals, knee length khaki shorts, a white buttoned down collared shirt with rolled up sleeves, a black bandanna pulled back the way a little cowgirl would wear, and sunglasses. Behind Norman, he and Gilda's only child, Peter, and his friend, Alan Townsend, sat. Both were twelve years old and wearing bathing suits and t-shirts. Despite his protesting, the passengers all ignored Norman's requests to fasten their seatbelts after they had pulled out of a gas station a few minutes ago.

"I didn't get to eat my Corn Flakes this morning because we were out of milk," Norman said.

"No," Gilda said. "We have some. I bought some yesterday like I always do when we're out."

"Oh."

Gilda turned to the back and asked, "What do you boys want to do once we get there?"

"Hit the water, definitely some putt-putt, go-karts, you know, the works," rattled off Peter.

"What about you, Alan?"

"Same stuff, but maybe also catching some crabs," Alan said.

"Maybe having a sand fight with ol' Pops," Peter said, and then hit Norman in the head with a gum wrapper. Alan repeated Peter's action and left a stinging sensation right behind Norman's ear. Norman glared into the rearview mirror and saw the boys laughing at him. He looked at Peter's head bobbing up and down like a fish. Norman wished he had a hook.

"Well, maybe you boys could also throw the football or Frisbee with Norman," Gilda said.

"I'm not throwing anything with Dad! He throws like a sissy. He'll embarrass us."

Norman watched Peter parody him by flipping his hand down gingerly.

"We could bury you up to your head in the sand and let the night tide tickle your face," Norman said to Peter.

"If anybody's going to be buried up to their head, it's gonna be that big bald beacon of yours so the birds will have somewhere to squat," Peter said.

The two boys laughed and high-fived. Norman sped up and watched the white lines suck under the car even more quickly. Gilda finished her high-pitched giggle reminiscent of a young child enjoying a puppy.

"Well, I want to go to the outlet malls," she said.

"We have malls at home," Norman said.

"But I've never been to the ones where we're going. So I'm going."

"Someone got told!" yelled Peter.

Norman applied more pressure from his Solemate tennis shoe and saw the lines transform into one long blur. He rested his right hand on the middle console. Gilda inched her hand near Norman's, but took his wallet from the drink holder and peered in it.

"It's in the bank," Norman said.

"This is all?" asked Gilda.

"Yes."

"We're going on a vacation."

"No, we're not," Norman muttered to himself.

Gilda turned and looked at Peter, and he kicked the back of Norman's seat. She mouthed to him, "Don't worry, we'll get it." Peter stared at the back of Norman's head.

The gray gravel of the road amused Norman as it whizzed under the car. No matter how much he drove, it was still there. Norman Jr. would delight in the road zipping by if he hadn't become Peter. It should've entertained Gilda, but she was not contractually obligated to be under her laws of marriage.

An overpass appeared in the distance, lurched over the road like a sleeping hulk. Norman shifted his weight and the hulk kept getting closer. This moment belonged to Norman. No one would backtalk this statement. Things could be the way he pictured. The car edged off the road.

"Norman, what the hell are you doing?" demanded Gilda. "You're veering off the road and you are going too fast. Our exit is coming up. Take a right off that and then take the next right."

Norman took a right off the exit, and then took the following right. The road seemed familiar and endless.



Keith Rogers, \_\_\_\_1, \_\_\_\_2, \_\_\_\_3



Blake Burton, DODGE

Laura Bonds

## JADE

Jade wakes to another boy on Sunday,  
eyes dull and worn  
as an alleyway penny.

She remembers being  
squashed into a burgundy Volvo wagon,  
frilly white dress, straw hat,  
and rigid in a wooden pew.

She remembers watching Snow White,  
trying to turn locked doors,  
the world splayed on the coffee table  
an unfinished jigsaw puzzle,  
imaging a kiss as a metamorphosis.

David and Jade tightrope-walked a fence,  
teetered with scabby knees and scruffy sneakers,  
she trailed a few steps behind,  
clutched his shoulders for support.

In Nintendo blue light  
on a second-hand plaid sofa,  
their lips met  
and their teeth collided.

She saves these memories for other Sundays,  
takes them down from the attic,  
moth-eaten and yellowed,  
and yet her eyes brighten,  
green and lost.



Lauren Cook, FIGURE

Alana Thaxton

TO A MAN AT FORTY<sup>7</sup>

This is you now, your hair combed over,  
your jeans rolled above your Allen Edmonds.  
You swing your daughter in the park  
while answering pages on a two-way.  
You own a construction company  
where you work more than you'd like  
to admit, bending and lifting, drugged  
with Loracet and heavy with middle age.  
A contractor calls you about a job  
and you put your fist to your chin.  
It's your thought pose, the one you used  
when Dr. Krusinski explained how a cat  
could be neither dead nor alive,  
and you said it had to be one or the other

and that someone would know, even  
if that someone were God.

Dr. Krusinski shook his head and continued,  
saying, There is a fifty percent chance...  
but by then we had tired of radioactive half-lives

and you proclaimed there was no difference  
between the behavior of a god  
and the operations of pure chance.

The class was silent. We all knew  
your uncle made a fortune laying pipeline  
and that you fought with physics,  
a subject you detested, to grease the cogs  
of your family machine.

You were so stoic, so sure,  
even Dr. Krusinski would not argue with you.

So I said that was like a line from a movie,  
like something William Shatner would say,  
and everyone burst into hysterics over you  
and Thomas Pynchon. I was elated.

You glanced at me, tarnished, convinced  
*She does not get it.* I couldn't see  
how in your mind you'd built the Crystal Palace  
and I had told you it was made of sand.

What terrific expectations we had,  
what courage in conceits so easily unwound.

Twenty years later you smile  
as your little girl waves back to me.

She calls for you to push her higher  
and you do, knowing she is old enough  
to hold on. She laughs, delighted by it all:  
your hands, the sky, the lady walking by,  
as if to say it is much easier to be happier  
when one has unlearned gravity.



Megan Roth, SYLLABUS FOR LIFE

# Susan Fant

# SLIPPING INTO JULIANA BRADSHAW'S MIND

He eats his chicken very oddly. He cuts it into large strips then dissects it to mere shreds of white floss. He doesn't hold his utensils correctly either. He grasps them underhandedly and jabs his butter knife into the chicken as though it were still alive and clucking. I watch him eat this way throughout the night – oils and herbs spurting out at all angles.

All I can do is sip my wine. Earlier, on my way to the powder room, I had tipped the waiter to keep discreetly filling my glass. Mother keeps watching us, smiling nervously. His nose just got covered with chicken grease, after he plunged his fork into the crevices between the leg and breast. I wonder if he realizes the grease is sparkling off his gargantuan nose. It matches the sweat around his receding hairline well.

He's a doctor, which might explain the chicken dissection. He chuckles through his nose. Yes, that's right; you're funny, sure thing. I smile and nod, trying to lean away from him and sink gracefully into my seat. My parents set me up for this. "So yes," my father says with fake heartiness, "you went to my alma mater for medical school. Little Julia always talked about going there, until she met you, of course."

# **The black sequins from the thousand-dollar dress, which was bought for me in Paris, rustle as I move. It's the only sound I can make.**

I wish I could leave, but I suppose it doesn't matter anyway, when I'm a college senior under pressure to hear wedding bells this summer. My mother reserved the chapel on campus at the Southern Millionaire's University two years ago. She was married there. My grandmother was married there. I smile again and put my hand to my chest. The doctor continues to cut on his chicken. He has big ears. They're red, hot red, sticking out of his head on both sides.

He stumbles through question after question that my father asks him. All dinner dates must be courted with parents, of course. This is no 1950s black and white television sitcom. This is 2006, where money, mergers, and acquisitions are involved. My mother stays silent, pecking at her food with pursed lips. I have learned not to mind anymore, my parent's meddling. It's safer than being here alone with the greasy-nosed chicken disaster.

I really want Chinese food right now. The doctor ordered for me. He ordered rosemary chicken with asparagus. Who eats asparagus, anyway? I can't hear the men anymore. I've learned after many dinner outings that I'm not really supposed to hear them at all. It's just an interview. It's like "The Apprentice," but I can't fire anyone.

The Mrs. Degree that my father picked out for me was a bad idea. What will I do with that now? Infer when to make Doctor Junior's chocolate chip cookies after soccer practice? I smile and nod more, but for some reason all I can do is look at that chicken. He's picking it dry. The bones are grey with brown patches. They still have floss hanging from them. I'm sure he'll whittle it away soon.

Father continues talking as he gets out of his seat and pulls back my mother's chair for her. The doctor puts his used fork and butter knife on his plate. It's half off the table. Only a few more dissections and it could have fallen off the table into his lap. That would have been amusing. He wipes his hand across his greasy nose and only makes the situation worse. The light from the chandelier reflects the smear well.

I began to move my chair from the table, but mother looks down at me with narrowed eyes and clears her throat. I'm supposed to wait. I always forget to wait. The doctor rushes to stand. He knocks the table and the glasses shake. I continue to look at the bony remains of his chicken. I can smell the rosemary underneath his fingernails as he holds the sides of the chair, pulling me closer to him.

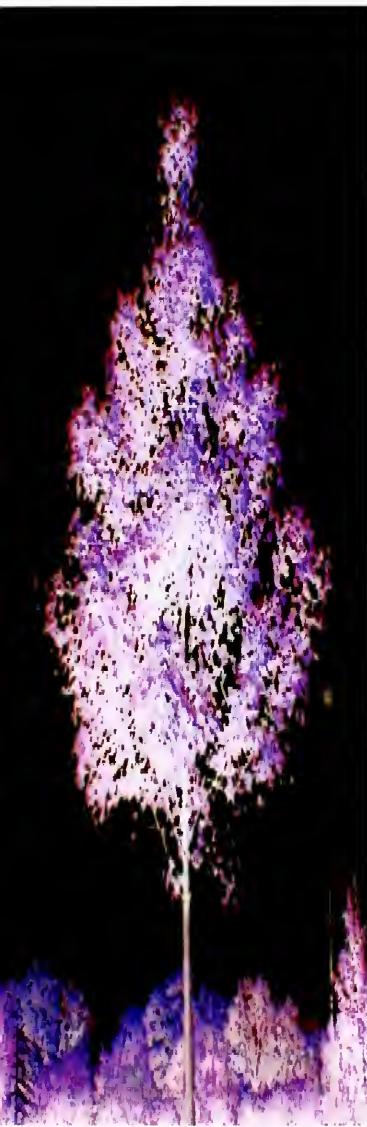
We're walking now, outside the restaurant in a park filled with fountains and flowers. My stilettos have already caused my toes to go numb. The doctor is breathing heavily. My father and my mother are walking behind us, keeping a sharp eye on my behavior. The black sequins from the thousand-dollar dress, which was bought for me in Paris, rustle as I move. It's the only sound I can make.

The doctor continues to talk. He looks at the ground and swallows his words with a gurgling. I look at the fountains, the shrubbery, and the lights strung into them. They wrap around, under, and over small branches. He continues to speak, and all I see are the small rocks that he shuffles between his feet as he tries to walk on gravel. He can't walk in loafers. He should try stilettos – maybe then he'd fall away.

His hands are draped by his sides. He keeps moving his fingers and wheezing. I don't want him holding my hand. I can already feel the breeze wisp between my fingers and curl around my left ring finger. I'm sure the engagement ring has already been picked out from Harry Winston. The wedding magazines, Tiffany's catalogues, and a montage of other women's wedding invitations have filled my mailbox for years.

I've been a bridesmaid for four years. The first wedding occurred after high school. Eloise was a lucky girl, my mother continues to note. She had landed her future CEO early, right out of high school, not even bothering to apply to college. His father owned oil refineries, millions of dollars in inheritance was sure to ensue. The dress she made us wear that day was starched salmon pink. I hate salmon pink.

He makes several attempts to move his hand toward mine, but fails each time. He stops at the end of the park and my father and mother leave to tell the valet to bring the car around. The doctor turns to me and looks into my eyes. His own are bloodshot and sag at the corners. I see his mouth moving, forming words I still can't hear. I brace myself for the inevitable and feel his lips on mine. The rosemary is sharp on his breath, and all I can do is feel sorry for that chicken.



Anna Reach

## ASHTON

Together we'd bronze our milky adolescent skins  
Blacken pale lashes rimming innocent blue eyes  
That blurred after too much Bud Light  
Drank strapped into backless shirts  
And seatbelts of older boy's Chevys.

Her dad told her to eat more jell-o  
When her figure turned fat.  
We'd overindulge in Wendy's and Milo's,  
Jack Daniels and Smirnoff hid under the cabinet  
T.J. Maxx and Goodwill t's that stretched over her spinning head  
When she lost her virginity to that Scott boy  
Whose blue eyes mirrored hers  
The two times they slept together.

She'd bounce down the school hall  
Gold spun ponytail chasing her shoulders  
That never hunched like mine but swayed back  
When she'd karaoke and when she'd flirt  
With men twice our age  
The ones with beards at Oak Mountain concerts  
And those sipping whisky at Velma's.

Tyler Sasser Cook, ILLUMINATED TREE

In tenth grade she'd had too much  
Called me at three in the morning  
I heard the vomit gurgle in her throat  
My eyes burned from interrupted sleep  
And hers from tears, acid and Bacardi  
I bitched, told her to go back to her carpeted bed  
Hung up. But sirens and an ambulance ride  
Proved me wrong and scared our suburbia parents.

We went back for more  
Of what we knew we didn't need  
Matching tattoos declaring our friendship  
An inked pledge of allegiance to no one but ourselves  
Peace signs and tear drops needledd in Southside  
When we knew nothing of tears or peace

Until her big brother Chase, died in his sleep  
Beneath her Laura Ashley comforter  
Body plowed with pills and booze.  
Three years later, so did her baby  
(same stanza)  
In a bloated stomach drenched with antiseptics.

The next weekend she wrapped her stilettos around a bar stool,  
Took a drag of her Marlboro Light,  
Ran a hand through her glittering hair and smiled.  
Lipsticked mouth curled, Ashton gave the band a toast  
And cracked open another Newcastle.

REFLECTION WITH THE MOON

The night never shined like this  
and the day is dim,  
like tennis shoe beaten grass  
under the blanket of the baobab tree.  
Memories only come at night  
like mango bats,  
nature's primitive pesticide.  
In my atmosphere,  
someone doesn't belong, and  
the answer always seems to be me.

The night never smiled like this  
and the day is dark  
as Nilza's complexion.  
I wish I was fluent in Portuguese.  
*Bondia senorita,*  
*Como estas.*  
*Estou ban, porque tu esta muy bonita.*  
Memories of her only come at night  
like Delinda with candles,  
mi madre in Mozambique,  
Membranes fumble her face,  
which my heart stumbles upon.

The night never sung like this  
and the day is dingy  
like the cuffs of my khakis far too intimate  
with the Cambine sand. Nights turn  
Chicueque quiet, memories are shells  
caught in Indian tides, thrown upon certainty.  
Yet, the world makes less sense  
than months ago. The day,  
Maputo pounding, leaving no time  
to cast experience into wisdom  
Nor impulse into moving thoughts.

The night never soothed like this  
And the day. I just want  
the day to shut up.



Meg Cook, UNTITLED

Jeremy Burgess

# KANSAS CITY NIGHTS

“Unforgettable moments start at just \$7199.” The TV was preaching to me on a Thursday evening in my cluttered apartment. I was watching a symmetrical, middle-aged white man ride around on a flashy Waverunner with his baby daughter. Maybe that was my problem, I thought. I’m stuck in Kansas City and I don’t have a damn Sea-Doo.

“Did you hear that?” I said. “Unforgettable moments have gone up lately. Must be the economy.” I loved ruthlessly tearing apart commercials, especially the ones that over-dramatically emphasize the nostalgia approach. It made me feel better about myself knowing that, if all else failed, I could surely succeed in the advertisement business.

“Jimmy, what the hell is wrong with you?” Walter asked. “You know those commercials ain’t for you. The only ones those Waverunner people care about is rich white folks, the ones that retire before they’re forty and live on the beach and shit.”

Walter was one of my roommates. He was named after Walter Matthau—his parents were, for some reason, huge fans of “The Odd Couple.” He uses himself as an example for his theory about names for black guys: either they’re some ridiculous combination of sounds ending with “-ell” or “-ious” or they’re a rich-sounding yuppie white guy name (like Glen, Richard, or Walter). He’s convinced that all black people fall into these two categories, despite the fact that he has family members with normal names like “Adam” and “David.” Walter is one of the most stubborn people I’ve ever met, so I stopped arguing with him a long time ago. I still give him hell for being named after a Jewish white guy, though.

Billy walked in right at that moment, his rustic plaid shirt semi-soaked from the rain. His fluffy dark brown hair stuck out on the sides whenever it got wet, and I always thought he looked like a mushroom when it



## Keith Rogers, PRESS IF YOU NEED A MAN WITH A DRINK IN HIS HAND

happened. He had just gotten back from dinner with his girlfriend, Jennifer, a short blonde from Baton Rouge. She spoke fluent French, worked at a Veterinary clinic, and cooked for Billy every weeknight. They had been dating ever since they finished up school at Missouri and he moved in with me, but he chose not to live with her after graduation—it was against his morals. I understood, though. Walter gives him shit for going to Jennifer's house every night just for food and foreplay, but I knew where Billy was coming from.

“What’s up, boys?” he said. He glanced at the TV after we returned the greeting and saw that we were watching an NBA game. Celtics vs. Bulls, a critical East Coast matchup that could determine who would make the playoffs in less than a week. Not that I cared that much, though—college basketball was my thing. Billy looked up at us with that genuine Southern sincerity of his, an attribute that allowed him to seem like he honestly cared about what was going on in the lives of those he knew. “You got a commercial comin on tonight, Walt?”

“Yeah, man. I just did a number about a week ago for the Pistons vs. Pacers game that’s comin on in a couple of nights. It’ll be playin during halftime.” Walter wrote rap lyrics for NBA jingles, the kind of thoughtless songs where the artists just yell the names of players and teams. “Spurs! Mavericks! Spurs! Mavericks!” His sister married a guy that works for ESPN, so she was able to pull a few strings when he dropped off an audition tape, and now he makes a living from it. I despise him for it, but at the same time, I wish that my job were that easy. Walter grew up as the son of a doctor in a nice Charlotte suburb, and he’s never had a real job in his life—if he wants to “pursue his dream” he’ll have to write about someone else’s struggles or just make it up. I’m sure half the rappers out there make it up anyways.

“So, is this one gonna suck as much as the last one?” I asked him jokingly.

“Man, fuck you, Jimmy,” he said with a slight grin on his face. “You know you couldn’t do my job the way I do it.”

"Yeah, cause my lyrics would actually be good." Walter and I have only lived together for less than a year, but we've already reached that safety point where we can make fun of each other out in the open.

"Hey, why don't you go write one of those sad songs about girls and put on a pair of your little sister's jeans or somethin'?" Not a day went by when Walter and I didn't argue about music. Despite the fact that we agree on lots of things, we love giving each other shit and over-emphasizing the stereotypes of the music we listen to.

"Alright, dude," I told him, "but if I hear anything in this one like 'I drop bombs like Lebron,' I'm gonna punch you in the face."

"Just shut up and watch the damn thing."

"Hey, Walt," Billy said, "when are you gonna let me write some raps for you, huh?" Despite the fact that Billy was from a sheep and cattle farm near the Kentucky/Tennessee border and that he had no interest in the NBA whatsoever, he was persistently asking Walter to let him write some lines for him. Ever since Walter got him hooked on stuff like Mos Def and Kanye West, Billy has been a hip-hop fanatic. Matter of fact, he might want to be a famous rapper even more than Walter does. "Come on, they'd never notice, man. Plus you know I've got skills."

Walter and I both had to laugh at that one. "Sure thing, buddy," said Walter. "I'll keep you posted. How's the weather look, man? We really gonna get that tornado they're talkin about in a couple of weeks?"

"Oh, man, I hope so," said Billy. "She'll be a good one." Billy was a professional storm-chaser. Ever since he was a kid, Billy has been fascinated with disastrous weather patterns and was willing to risk his life to learn more about them. At age seven, he rode his bicycle into the middle of a tornado while his parents thought he was in the basement bathroom. He was thrown roughly fifty feet into a ditch and broke both his arms—when he regained consciousness in the hospital, he was giddy like a school boy at Six Flags.

We were expecting nice tornado weather in about two weeks, the kind of storm that the weathermen are calling potentially the biggest storm of the year. In the Midwest, that means something. The weather in my suburban Alabama hometown couldn't hold a candle to the windstorm breeding ground that was Kansas City. Back in Birmingham, grade schools all over the state would close for the day if we got an inch of snow. News reporters would tell us to buy supplies of bread and milk in preparation for various Gulf Coast hurricanes—I can't remember any storm that came close to living up to the Y2K-style disaster forecast that we were subjected to.

"It's gonna be a good season, boys, I can just feel it," said Billy.

It was currently April. May and June were what Billy called "the climatological peaks for tornado activity," so he was getting prepared for his money-making season. Billy would be traveling all over the Midwest this year as part of a job he just got with Fox News. I guess pretty soon I'll be the only one in this apartment that isn't on TV in some fashion.

"Hey, Walt," said Billy, "maybe you could write one of those rap songs about a tornado or somethin'. Or, hey, Jimmy, maybe you could write a book about me or something." Billy always got excited about storm season, but I guess he had good reason this year. He was living his dream. Now that I think about it, I guess I was the only one of the three of us that wasn't living a dream.

# At age seven, he rode his bicycle in the middle of a tornado while his parents thought he was in the basement bathroom.

“Well, you have to either kick some ass or die if the book’s gonna sell,” I told Billy. “Your choice.”

We were each fresh out of grad school at the University of Missouri, where we all met for the first time. Billy studied Broadcast Journalism, I studied English, and Walter studied American History, which I still don’t understand. If Walter was ever to get a real job, he would wind up working for his dad as some sort of doctor’s assistant. He’ll be in scrubs in a few years, I’m sure. NBA rappers don’t last forever, right?

This had been our first year in the real world, and we were still single (except for Billy), short-changed, and scared as hell. But we ignored that fear and chose to support ourselves until we felt like growing up.

Walter’s commercial came on, a nice one-minute spot featuring him and three other guys. Walter got his own verse this time, too. I still wasn’t impressed.

“That was pretty badass, man,” said Billy.

“Good job, bro,” I lied to him as he was jumping around the room while screaming. Not that I wasn’t happy for him—I was. Actually, I was more jealous than happy. Walter was the laziest human being I knew, and he was making more money than I was with the perk of being able to tell his friends and impressionable women that his voice is on ESPN.

After Walter’s charade, Billy and I went outside to smoke a cigarette. This had become a nightly ritual for the two of us—we would sit outside on our balcony, have a few cigarettes, and talk about things. Walter stayed inside to watch the rest of the game; he called it “research.”

I lit the end of my Turkish Silver, took the first drag, and handed Billy the box. We stopped buying our own packs of cigarettes in an effort to quit—now, instead, the two of us only buy one shared pack at a time and leave it on the kitchen counter. It seemed to be working for me at least. Nowadays I only smoked at night when I was city-watching with Billy, even though I could go through four or five cigarettes when we had a good conversation going. He seemed to be building up the same system.

Our sixth-floor balcony had become almost like a sanctuary to Billy and me. Tonight it seemed even more like one. The rain poured down around us on the streets of Kansas City as I leaned over the bars and peered down at the city below, letting the rain soak into my tangled mess of hair. I witnessed a sea of red and white lights erupting in blurs from a late-night wreck-induced traffic jam. People were scrambling under the protection of umbrellas and newspapers, scurrying like field mice to their respective destinations. In front of me I saw the neon glow of various businesses—Tower Records, Verizon Wireless, Wendy’s, Miss Julia’s Vintage Clothing, Blockbuster Video, the Kansas City Jewish Memorial Hospital. Beyond all of these buildings, to the Northeast, I could see the heart of the downtown district. I loved watching the multi-story office buildings in the

distance at night—it seemed like every time one of my white-collar brothers and sisters switched off their lights for good, another window would become illuminated. I always kept up with what I liked to call the “Big Four,” meaning the four biggest office buildings in Kansas City. After nearly a year of balcony observations, I still have never seen one of the Big Four completely un-lit, not even on Thanksgiving (perhaps Christmas Day was a different story, but I managed to leave Missouri for a week last December).

We sat down on the back porch in our recliners. When we were moving in, the three of us decided to get a set of old, shitty recliners from the thrift store and somehow squeeze them onto a relatively small balcony (which we accomplished quite handily, actually). Mine was forest green, Billy’s was a tan/beige color, and Walter’s was a plaid pattern of mostly pink and light blue—all for less than forty bucks.

I decided I would break the ice this time—Billy and I had a subconscious understanding that we were expected to take turns in bringing up a subject of conversation for the evening panel.

“So, how’s Jennifer doin?” I asked. Ever since she started cooking for him all the time, Walter and I rarely ever saw her over at our place. She still comes to hang out with us every now and then, but we hadn’t seen her all month for more than five minutes at a time.

“Oh, man, she’s great.”

“What’d she cook you tonight?”

“Boudins.”

“What the hell is a boudin? Is that some sort of Louisiana thing that I wouldn’t understand?”

“Oh, *man*.” Billy would unconsciously let his Southern drawl slip out whenever he got excited. Judging by the fact that he just made “man” a two-syllable word, I’d say that he enjoyed his meal. “It’s like a combination of rice and sausage, or any meat I guess. She goes through a lot to get it, too. She has to go down to the Kroger and have them special order the stuff from this online Cajun grocer. It’s a lot of work, man, but damn, those things are good.”

“Sounds legit to me,” I said, tapping out the ash from the end of my cigarette. Billy and I had installed a small table with an ash-tray in between our recliner. My recliner was on the far left, so that I could see the Big Four more clearly, and Billy’s was in the middle. Since Walter didn’t smoke, his recliner was on the right.

“Ya know,” Billy said, “I think I may just marry that girl. She’d be real easy to live with.” Just what I needed—another friend getting married. “What about you, Jimmy? When are you gonna find a girl and settle down?”

“Well, I gotta actually find a girl first, man.” Billy knew about my frustrations with the opposite sex. Every time he brought up the subject, it was like being simultaneously encouraged and slapped in the face. “It’s not as easy as I thought it would be in this town.”

I had no problems with girls in high school or college. Even had a couple of serious relationships. But when I left Missouri with a masters but no girlfriend, I had to start from scratch in this new city.

“I know what you mean,” Billy said. He didn’t.

“It’s just that, well, it seems like the girls in Kansas City are more interested in what’s printed on my underwear rather than what’s actually under them.”

Billy laughed. “I hear ya, man, I hear ya.”

It felt like we had talked for hours when Walter came out on the balcony forty-five minutes later. Apparently a friend of his from Mizzou was throwing a house party that night and Walter's presence was mandatory.

"Y'all need to come with me and get a little bit of alcohol in ya," Walter said.  
"Besides, it's not like yall have nine-to-five's or anything."

He was right. Billy was on call and worked only when it was necessary (except for during storm season) and my only current form of employment was writing as a freelancer for the *Kansas City Star*. Not much money for either of us, but we made enough for food, gas, rent, cable, and cigarettes.

"I think I'm alright," Billy said. "I was thinking about just putting on *Batman* or something sweet like that and passing out in my bed."

"Fine then, sheep boy," said Walter. "Jimmy, I know you gonna come with me. Fine-lookin women'll be there."

I was skeptical at first. "I don't know, dude. I'm workin on an article tonight that I have to have in by tomorrow." I was lying, of course, but Walter didn't give enough shits about my newspaper writing to keep up with my actual deadlines. He read the articles but only because we got a free subscription to the *Star* and because I agreed to watch his stupid TV clips whenever they were on.

"Aw, fuck that, dude. When was the last time you even talked to a girl?"

Walter was right. It had been a couple of months now since I last had a decent conversation with a female.

"Alright, man, I'll go," I agreed. "But if it's lame, I'm gonna kick your ass."

"Fine by me," said Walter as he walked back indoors. "But you know it won't be." He was probably right again, considering the fact that I had been hanging out at the apartment a lot lately.

"Give me a few minutes to get ready." I flicked what was left of my cigarette off of the balcony (sometimes I wondered if I ever hit pedestrians, but I wasn't too concerned at the moment) and said farewell to Billy, who still had several drags left.

I walked inside and immediately collapsed face-up onto our old, worn-out, duct-tape-covered brown bean bag. I stared around the room for a bit. Our faded white walls were covered with 2001 movie posters left over from my days as a Movie Gallery employee—*Hannibal*, *Memento*, *Enemy at the Gates*, *Joe Dirt*, *Monlin Rouge*, *Swordfish*, *Tomb Raider*. Our Italian red leather couch had pairs of my gym shorts thrown over the top of it and an old white pillow at one end for afternoon naps in front of the TV. Our antique/worthless coffee table was covered in paper plates, plastic cups (some empty, some half full), papers, and crumbs. There were stray t-shirts thrown all over the place—we began to stop caring and started wearing each other's shirts months ago. The TV, a big-screen Samsung that was a graduation gift from Walter's parents, was still on the Celtics vs. Bulls game. The Bulls were winning, eighty-eight to eighty-three, with 4:24 left in the fourth quarter.

"Jimmy!" yelled Walter, who had just brushed his teeth and changed into a fresh collared shirt. "Let's go man! I thought you said you were getting ready."

"I was," I said. "I was." I stood up, brushed myself off a couple of times, and we walked outside.

Daniel P. Strandlund

NURSERY WORKER

Keeper of Light Switch and Thermostat,  
who in the beginning brought chairs  
down from tables and crayons from the high places,  
who from blank sheets of paper  
decreed that airplanes  
should roam the ceiling panels  
and bounce off windows  
to fall nose-down to the rug,  
who from his pitcher  
poured lemonade into cups  
and from his pouch  
gave animal crackers  
to kangaroo upon paper towel placemats,  
who with tissue called snot  
from the noses of the sick  
and salt from the eyes  
of the elbow-scraped and the carpet-burned,  
who in the storm protected with a blanket  
and in the sun reached down his hand  
as a tree branch from which the future could swing,  
who, when churchgoers  
came back to claim their worshippers,  
gathered crumbs fallen  
from mouths buried worshipfully  
in the excess of expensive dresses.

Chris Adkins

ART I CHOKE HAIKU

This Artichoke love -  
most just nibble at the leaves  
but I ate the heart



Meg Cook, UNTITLED

# Reese Julian

# THE GRINCH

After speaking to the nurse, the bald man with rosy apple cheeks and a bushy white beard walked into the bedroom. The room was unadorned with the exception of a couple of old pictures of what appeared to be a young man with his parents, some dingy green curtains, a lamp, and a group of boxes by the door. In the middle of the room, a man lay still in a tiny bed. The entering man placed his hand on his own chest. His old heart felt like it was thumping on the inside of a hickory tree. Whatever happened next, the man hoped it wouldn't cause another attack to his poor, withered heart.

"Hello, Mr. Appleton, it's me, Sal Tunney. I was told you wanted to see me," the entering man said.

Mr. Appleton slightly opened his eyes, and his brow wrinkled while attempting to look at Sal.

"Closer," Mr. Appleton whispered in a raspy tone.

Sal walked to Mr. Appleton's bedside and kneeled down. Mr. Appleton lurched his head out of his bed covers to reveal a long, haggard white beard that still remained partially hidden. White curls still hung on the sides of Mr. Appleton's head, but he remained

completely bald up top. Pink blotches speckled his dry white face and stubby nose, giving his face an uncanny reddish tone to it. However, his plump cheeks still retained a defined natural pinkish hue, indicating they had been quite rosy.

"It is you, isn't it? Helmer Appleton. Nice to meet you, Sal. Thanks for coming. Not much time for us. My number's up."

"Er, I'm sorry, Mr. Appleton. I got a call from a young girl saying you had to see me before you...left. Your neighbors also insisted on me coming, saying it was very important. They said I was the only person you wanted to see, so I'm a bit confused."

"You're new to town, I know, Mr. Tunney. But I'm sure you know I've been the town's Santa for almost fifty years. No more. I need you to replace me."

Sal looked at the withered old Santa before him and wondered how a man in such a state could be playing a joke on him. But he wasn't. The Santa with the stifled breathing genuinely wanted a complete stranger to succeed him.

"Why me? Why...I don't understand," Sal said.

"I've seen you around the past few months. Studied you. You have the look. The beard, the face, maybe the body too. Can't deny that. Every great town needs a great Santa."

"Maybe so, but I just deliver papers for a living. I'm not cut out to do this."

Mr. Appleton heaved a low, but deep cough that sounded like it originated from the depths of his stomach rather than his chest. For the duration of his time with Sal, he had only moved his facial features, nothing else. Spittle had gathered on his lips.

"Santa never dies, Mr. Tunney. I have faith in you. This is my only wish. I had...the boxes by the...door laid out...for you. The small gift box on top is...to be given to Lorraine...Lomax. That sweet girl always...helped the elderly...here."

"Mr. Appleton, please..."

"Don't ever for...get those wond...erful faces, Mr. Tun...ney. Noth...ing defines...happiness more. They are...God's chil..dren. You won't...care if they are rich or...poor. You will love...them all the...same."

Sal attempted to appeal further to Mr. Appleton's sense of greater reasoning, but Mr. Appleton refused to answer. Sal shook him, but Santa Claus was dead. Refusing to break the news about someone he didn't know to people he didn't know, Sal sat on the floor next to the boxes. After ten minutes, he opened them to reveal a number of photo albums cataloguing Mr. Appleton's career as Santa. Each page had been handled with care and decorated with a pristine touch. Mr. Appleton sat in each picture grinning with the white ball of his cap slumped behind him. Every child in each of the pictures always wore a smile. Sal had never seen such unbridled happiness. He opened the last box under Lorraine Lomax's gift box and found Mr. Appleton's Santa suit in fine care. Sal placed the Santa hat atop his own head and let it the white ball of the cap slump forward into his face. The hat fit perfectly. He tried to pick Lorraine's gift up, but accidentally took the top of it off, revealing its contents. "Christ!" Sal said after examining it.

Once he emerged from the small house, Sal saw various neighbors talking to one another and two people finally appearing out of the white ambulance parked out front.

"Well?" one of the neighbors asked.

"Mr. Appleton has passed," Sal said.

"Yeah, but what did he say?"

# Sal shook him, but Santa was dead.

"Nothing. Only that he had no regrets and that he was concerned about the town's well-being."

The crowd demanded a fuller explanation of what transpired between Sal and Mr. Appleton, but Sal walked to his car. He stopped at once when he heard a familiar voice he could not place. He recognized the girl as Lorraine Lomax.

"Mr. Tunney! Did he ask you?" Lorraine asked while running with her father, Arthur Lomax, toward Sal.

"Ask what?" Sal responded.

"You know what he asked you. To be the next Santa."

Sal closed his eyes. "Yes."

"Will you? You have to. No one else could do it." Lorraine's large, round eyes began to water.

"I don't understand you people. Can't you just visit another Santa in another town?"

"Of course not," Arthur Lomax interjected. "We need our own Santa, Mr. Tunney."

"I'm afraid that's not me. Find someone else."

Sal opened the door to his car and began getting in, only to have Arthur Lomax pull on his sleeve to catch him.

"Mr. Tunney, you can't do this. You're killing a symbol in this town."

"I don't get it. Santa's just a seasonal figure. He's a fictional character. Families will get together; people will get presents and all that stuff without him."

"But Santa's an embodiment of all those things. You take him away, then you take a little bit of Silver Springs away. Just think of this generation of children not having a Santa, and how different this place will be one day as a result. A Santa can hold a town together. Helmer Appleton understood that. You could be Helmer Appleton. You could be our Santa."

"Sorry, Mr. Lomax, but Helmer Appleton is in that house. I could never wear the suit like he did. I just deliver the news."

"Please, Mr. Tunney," Lorraine begged.

Sal frowned and looked at the ground. He patted her hand as she held her hands together in a ball in front of her, pleading for him to reconsider. After apologizing to Lorraine, he got into his car so he would only hear her crying instead of also seeing it. Sal drove off, leaving the crowd of bewildered neighbors and voyeurs. Once at home, he took out Lorraine's gift box and concluded he would throw it away after eyeing its contents once more. Inside the box lay a picture of Lorraine with Santa. She rested on Santa's knee and smiled, showing all of her baby teeth. Sal flipped the picture over and found a message that read, "Your first visit at age two. You were always on the 'Good' list."



D. B. Irwin EZEKIEL 25:17

Susan Fant

## INDOCTRINATION OF THE WEST

1.

America's heartland swells today,  
and rainbow covered clouds mist with drops,  
high over the sun-colored Rockies, which swallow  
us whole.

Emerson's late night fantasy:  
little pastoral farm houses, sitting alone,  
shaded by trees and cattle among us.  
One road divides us, cutting through  
grass and yellow clover like the giant red sun.

On the first day, God said, "Let there be light,"  
and the sun and the moon, the first thing we shared,  
spread throughout the countryside.

Temptation, temptation,  
lurks in those giant John Deer tractors,  
green monsters of giant steel, who mesh into pastures,  
seamlessly acting as though they belong.

White picket fences cover this land,  
big rock deserts of fertility,  
with sporadic trees that grow: grow higher, grow taller  
than they ever thought they could.

2.

A childlike God creates  
crevices in these mountainsides, smearing fingers  
in freshly poured concrete,  
crafting huge castles that lead up millions of miles  
just to remind us of our own height.

Follow the yellow brick roads of hay that line the highway,  
follow them to the cities.  
Heaps of volcanic fruit  
act as orange cones to keep you looking straight  
away from the multi-colored train cars and white steeples  
that rise into the sun.

Massive lands plead for expansion, trading lives simultaneously  
with grass and oats and soy beans.  
The winds push through this country,  
making the trees bend back and the inhabitants  
listen.

3.

Who is the falcon? Give us the falcon?  
We know he went this way.  
Film noir grips dark alleys and  
green, green pastures are strangled by shadows  
that blanket the fields and slopes of small cities.

Now give me an umbrella covered in soot.  
Let me see the sights of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street.  
Audrey Hepburn sits in a corner side café,  
dripping in Tiffany's, shaking her head,  
wrinkling her pasty-colored nose in disapproval.

Miss Hepburn, why do you refuse the lakes?  
Residing inside are only giant goldfish.  
These fish, these fish, could beat the cow, who flew over the moon,  
in mere width alone.  
Although it wouldn't make the evening news,  
unless they drank up Central Park.

4.

Marsh Valley, Utah, did you watch the immigrants  
beating through those mountains –  
digging, hitting, hitting, nothing but dust –  
blowing things up with dynamite to meet at Promontory Point  
for one gold spike.

Green never came in this many shades,  
only a melted Crayola box could show.  
Why did you ever question the meeting of the west  
by oxen and cart?  
Stout men bear their own trains and planes.

Connection of the East and West,  
a gold mine,  
horses gallop across the flat plains,  
past the mountain ranges,  
that are airbrushed on canvas to be sold.

5.

The deputy sheriff still lives,  
gold star gleaming from headlights  
of cars traveling like pockets of wagons  
and caravans years before them.

Still apparitions are very visible, so very viable.  
Climbing the trail alongside in single file,  
they peer, creeping around the Rockies,  
still praying not to wake the Indians.

And what do we have to compare to  
lore back in the East,  
or back in the North or South?  
Flaming crosses burning plantations,  
fighting our differences through ravenous fire.

Here the differences are fought,  
twelve paces, two guns, a handful of covered watchers.  
But then it ends –  
the land still allowing for the one Indian to be seen,  
staring at you between two mountains,  
soon to sweep with the Sioux nation.

6.

The sun sets like molten lava.  
Dripping beneath the horizon,  
the only flame present slowly melts  
over fields leaving streams  
of pink and orange.

And as cowboy hats are hung  
on the rusty nails by front doors  
we all look at patches of grass woven with torn fiber  
and ask silently for Grace.

Two separate worlds,  
unionized and democratized,  
are broadcast as a country on equal ground.  
But here the days are longer, the sun shines harder,  
soaks into single red barns  
that stand alone, peering at stocky mountainsides  
like a rehearsal of David and Goliath.

Elizabeth Frye

### A SONG FOR MOTHER

Wake up, Mother.

Untangle the morning. It is a pearl necklace.  
Put it on. Let it hang across your cratered collarbone.  
Carry me like your sewing basket.

Today, let's pretend to be the pair of red birds singing in our sugar maple.

Come to the edge of the bed, where I lay my face.  
Look at the light on the shades. Swim into the sun.  
Eat the apple on the neighbor's tree.  
Crawl between the monkey grass, it hides gnomes.  
Outside is a hungry dog. Our visitor.  
Feed him with both hands.  
He will sniff out the gnomes in our garden.  
He will reveal their secrets.

Wake, mother.

Throw one leg out of bed. Put on your glasses.  
So you can see I am a fortuneteller.  
I see the day ahead.

The crystal haze of firefly-catching days in June.  
The world, skulking across the front yard, already deserts us.

Morning will leave us for afternoon.  
And I am here now.  
It will be years before I leave you.

Open the closed shades. Salute the ceiling.

It knows everything, doesn't it? Its texture traps your gaze.  
Speak to the floor, who holds your thoughts  
deep in its carpet, away from the pull of the vacuum cleaner.

Take life out of your dress pocket

And run through this magic eight ball of summer  
with me, while I am five, with small-palmed hands  
ready for the red body of Alabama clay,

I am in a hurry.

But I am waiting on you.  
But I am waiting for you.  
But I am waiting with you.



Carrie Tompkins, METAMORPHOSIS

### CHANGE FOR A DOLLAR

The man on the neon horse smokes  
a cigar, enduring a lonely vigil above the rusted  
station. *El Cheapo! El Cheapo!* The cowboy's words  
flash from among his exhales, epiphanies  
caught like exclamations in speech-  
bubbles, like the cartoons I used to read passing  
the time in the car's cramped backseat while Mom struggled  
with the roadmaps and Dad ashed his pipe out  
the window with tiny impatient thuds. These ceaseless  
lanes of asphalt and billboards are as lonely now  
as they were back in those long-ago  
days of summer road-trips and family vacations.  
Parked beside the old payphones with the new stickers  
that say *35 cents required*, I'm searching  
for change in my pockets and along the dashboard.  
Across the lot, a faded red pickup and its  
muttering engine beside the pump seem like  
the only other things that stir. Wispy brown fields  
drenched in winter's death surround the gas station  
and its clientele. Inside, I have a suspicion that  
the attendant is always scratching away at lottery tickets when  
no one else is looking. The owner  
of the pickup pays for the gas and drives toward  
the towns I passed this morning. *Rajado, San Teresa,*  
*Ojos Caliente, Solo.* Someone scratched out the mile  
markers beside the list of names on the road sign long ago,  
and I have no idea how many miles he'll go  
before Santa Fe hits him like it hit me.  
My car is a mess, and I give up the quest ion my  
pockets and venture inside. The attendant  
is still scratching, muttering to himself that  
the state lottery jackpot hasn't had  
a winner in weeks. As I stand there, glancing  
from his greasy black hair to the cowboy outside  
on the sign and back to my own outstretched hands,  
I hear thunder grumbling in the distance and  
I let out a sigh. I'm just looking for change  
for a dollar so I can make a phone call.



Elizabeth Wilson, HYDRANT



Keith Rogers, \_\_\_\_4, \_\_\_\_5, \_\_\_\_6



## EDITOR'S NOTE

At Birmingham-Southern College, the well of artistic endeavor is far from drying out. Even so, this issue of QUAD cannot possibly infiltrate every corner of creative activity occurring on campus. However, I believe what is contained within these pages serves a representation of the talent and efforts of the student body, faculty, and alumni.

I am extremely grateful to the staff members for their commitment to the magazine and for their desire to foster the development of the arts within our community. I thank all those who submitted their work for consideration and encourage students to support the magazine in the future.

## POLICY

QUAD, the literary magazine of Birmingham-Southern College, was founded in 1940 and is published annually. The editors encourage undergraduate submissions, and those from faculty and alumni, which are reviewed anonymously by QUAD staff members. QUAD is funded by the Student Government Association. Submissions policies are subject to change from year to year. The views expressed in QUAD are those of the artists and authors and are not necessarily those of the staff, faculty advisor, Publications Board, SGA, or the administration of Birmingham-Southern College.

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## COLOPHON

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